Hobart East Timor Committee
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Address to the
United Nations Decolonization Committee
August 1990

Your Excellency; Respected Members of this Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present again a petition regarding the de-colonization of East Timor.

We would first like to congratulate you on the success of United Nations initiatives for a peaceful transition from colonialism to independence in Namibia. In passing, we note that it is 40 years since the Reverend Michael Scott addressed the UN General Assembly regarding the right of self-determination of the people of Namibia (4th Committee of the UN November 26, 1949). The persistence with which the United Nations worked on the issue of Namibia, despite pressure to remove it from the agenda, has been rewarded with a peaceful transition of power and provides one of the most important reasons for the United Nations', and this Committee's, continued existence. The points made by Michael Scott remain relevant in 1990; in particular that colonialism, and especially colonialism imposed and maintained by military might, also damages the political, moral and economic fabric of the colonial power.

We believe that UN support and persistence will enable East Timor also to join the ranks of the free and independent countries in the near future. We note the parallels between South African and Indonesian intransigence as colonial powers. Just as South Africa refused to negotiate directly with the Namibian people so Indonesia refuses to negotiate with the East Timorese. The nations which supported South African colonialism are largely the same nations that support Indonesian colonialism. South Africa's wish to retain Namibia because of its mineral wealth is mirrored by Indonesia's wish to retain East Timor because of the vast supplies of oil believed to be below the Timor Sea. And just as South Africa claimed to be 'developing' and 'civilizing' the 'primitive' Namibia, so does Indonesia claim to be 'developing' and 'civilizing' this 'primitive' East Timor.

This claim of 'development' is one of the most insidious as it is used to divert attention away from the fundamental right to self-determination. I saw this Indonesian 'development' in East Timor when there two months ago. I saw many roads being built with much erosion from the poor methods used. What are roads to the Timorese who haven't vehicles like the Javanese transmigrants do? They are mostly an effective method of military transportation and control. I saw several schools that appeared new. But what are new schools when they teach nothing in the native language? How much is an education worth when all jobs are given almost exclusively by Javanese administrators to 'newcomer' Javanese and other non-Timorese? This education must be worth less. And of what value are simple hospitals when the military terrorizes the population? These hospitals can provide little comfort for those who have been raped, tortured or have had their villages destroyed. I was told by these dispossessed people of military killings and intimidation tactics. The Indonesian commander ordered villagers to cut their dead countryman's head off and then paraded it through villages for all to see.

I want to say to you that I cannot prove any of the above reports; I must leave that to others. But I can assure you, the look in the eyes of a boy who has lost both parents and two brothers (who were Catholic Priests) to this sort of terrorism is proof enough.

In my travels I saw Timorese villagers living simply, eking out a hard life, growing food to eat and trade. The rivers run cleanly through these villages. I also saw towns rapidly becoming dominated by the 'new', modern Javanese-style commerce: that of processed and packaged food, and much throw-away plastic. The rivers in these towns looked just like they do in Java, full of rubbish and covered in scum.

All Indonesian actions in East Timor seem to have a military or propaganda function as their first priority, while respected development organizations worldwide repeatedly emphasize that development in which the people directly affected are not free to express their own wishes, does not deserve the name 'development'.

The harm of this occupation does not stop at East Timor's borders. Just as South Africa claimed to be 'developing' Namibia while massive malnutrition, unemployment and poverty existed within South Africa's Black population, it must not be forgotten that while Indonesia claims to be 'developing' East Timor, millions of Indonesians continue to live without such fundamental services as clean water, primary health care or basic education. A new Indonesian organization INFIGHT(Indonesian Front for the Defence of Human Rights) provides these statistics: 80% of Indonesia's people live in poverty. 80% of the workforce have little or no schooling. Infant mortality is 87 per 1000 births. 89.23% of the population has no access to clean water. Another source puts the state's unemployment at more than 66%

From these figures it can be seen that Indonesia can ill afford its occupation of East Timor. Its 15-year war, which has killed two to three hundred thousand Timorese and around 20,000 Indonesian militia, has cost the State in excess of US$10 billion. The war has been costly in human and economic terms.

I would like to share with you some of the results of an investigation by a team of social scientists from an Indonesian University (Gadjah Mada University; Jogjakarta). Their findings, describing social relationships between Indonesian authorities and Timorese people, were to have been discussed on 19/4/90 at a seminar in Dili. The findings were instead discussed in a private session with several senior army officials.

The team found a society still in trauma. They describe the continuing 'war situation' and 'war economy' full of control and 'monopolistic' practices. The team observed that while there had been 'striking physical changes' since their first visit almost a decade before (ie. road networks), they concluded that "physical progress has failed to solve the social, economic and political problems resulting from the process of integration which caused "quite heavy loss of life". The team recommended the "abandonment of resettling programs" and that land be redistributed to landless peasants.

Resolution 1514 (XV), declaration 2 states that all people have the right to self determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. On March 20, 1985 the Indonesian Minister of Transmigration, Martono, stated, "By way of Transmigration...we will try...to integrate all the ethnic groups into one nation...the different ethnic groups will in the long run disappear because of integration...". It would seem to me that this statement is in opposition to resolution 1514 (XV), declaration 2.

So, despite 15 years of oppressive military occupation the people of East Timor continue to seek self-determination with great courage and persistence. Last year, East Timor's spiritual leader, Monsignor Carlos Belo, requested the UN Secretary-General to conduct a referendum in East Timor and this request has received widespread support within East Timor despite Indonesia's efforts at intimidation. The growing number of visitors to East Timor, including myself, since its partial opening last year means that the oppressive nature of Indonesian Colonialism can no longer be hidden. One important consequence is the discreet but growing willingness of people in Indonesia to accept that East Timor is a colonial issue and that the peaceful achievement of decolonization is also in their best interest.

Any examination of East Timor's situation would not be complete without mention of the parallel sufferings of the people of West Papua who implored me to raise their concerns in this forum and to the world community. The many diverse Papuan cultures face certain extinction if present trends continue.

In conclusion, we would like to commend the commitment of the Portuguese Government and the UN Secretary-General, Mr Perez de Cuellar, to achieving de-colonization in East Timor; and especially the work of this Committee in its efforts to achieve a world in which subject nations and peoples are a thing of the past.

Thank you

D McGregor

Respectfully Submitted by Douglas McGregor on behalf
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